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The "Beyondness of Things" in The Buccaneers: Vernon Lee's Influence on Edith Wharton's Sense of Places

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> The emotion which has been stirred in me by localities may be transmitted, though the images cannot; and those whose feelings have been heightened by the transmission of mine will find in what they *do* see, and make in what they *do not* see, places and things to delight their hearts.
>
> Vernon Lee, *The Sentimental Traveller*

Since its publication in 1938, readers have been at odds in their assessment of *The Buccaneers*, Edith Wharton's only novel set in England. While her literary executor, Gaillard Lapsley, and many early reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic saw great promise in the unfinished novel, a few critics like Edmund Wilson wrote the work off as 'an old-fashioned story for girls' and judged Wharton's skills 'dulled' in this her last book. In the 1980s, however, feminist critics found much to value in the novel: from protagonist Annabel St. George's self-actualization to the comradeship of the American girls and the close relationship between Annabel and her European governess. Since Marion Mainwaring's 1993 completion of *The Buccaneers* and the 1995 BBC production of the screenplay by Maggie Wadey, the novel has once again incurred harsh criticism, perhaps in part because of these completions. In a very critical *New Yorker* article on these 'reworkings,' John Updike pronounced the novel itself a 'pretty mess,' full of 'internal contradictions and proliferating loose ends.' In a recent scholarly examination of the intellectual history of Wharton's work, Claire Preston dismissed *The Buccaneers* as 'too nostalgic,' the plot as 'too sentimental and romantic to stand up as satire,' and the characters as 'cartoon-like and corny.'[1] While I am not going to be an apologist for this unfinished novel, I would like to suggest that many of the loose ends can be tied up, some of the contradictions and sentimentality

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explained if readers see the novel through Wharton's interest in place. Through this lens *The Buccaneers* becomes both a rather imaginative rewriting of the romance novel and a different sort of *Bildungsroman*, and not just for girls. Theories about place and perception articulated by Wharton's friend and mentor Vernon Lee drive the plot as surely as the transatlantic matings of financially strapped British aristocrats and nouveau riche American heiresses.[2]

In her memoir *A Backward Glance* (1934), which Wharton was working on while planning *The Buccaneers*, she meditated on her intense reactions to her environment from a very early age: her 'photographic memory of rooms and houses' and her 'secret sensitiveness to the landscape.' She explains how as a child she was 'tremblingly and inarticulately awake to every detail' and 'profoundly alive to a unifying magic beneath the diversities of the visible scene.' But with no words to understand her responses (she found them 'quite incommunicable') and no like-minded friends or family members to talk with about them, these sensitivities became, along with her shyness and allergies and bookishness, yet another disturbing marker of her difference.[3] As an adult Wharton came to understand her spontaneous psychological reactions as aesthetic responses. Vernon Lee's writings helped Wharton articulate the meaning of her early and abiding sensitivity to her surroundings. In a letter of thanks, Wharton wrote that Lee's books gave her entry to 'that wonder world of Italy which I had loved since my childhood without having the key to it.'[4] In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton termed Lee's cultural and historical studies of Italy her 'best beloved companions of the road,' and she named Lee 'the first highly cultivated and brilliant woman' she had ever known, saying she stood 'in awe' of her.[5] Lee's skill in evoking the atmosphere of a place and her sensitivity in explaining people's relationships with places became standards for Wharton's own writing, both fiction and nonfiction. When Vernon Lee asked Wharton what she thought of her play, *Ariadne in Mantua* (1903), Wharton in a frank and revealing reply wrote that while the play itself lacked drama ('movement and clash of emotions'), the stage directions were masterful: 'I have always thought that no one has your gift of suggesting in a few touches an Italian landscape or picture; and the little stage directions at the head of each act are so beautiful that one feels they ought to be, not the mere illuminated border of the page, but its central subject.'[6]

Vernon Lee was the pseudonym of British expatriate Violet Paget, who lived in Italy but published prolifically in England, producing more than forty works of cultural and aesthetic criticism as well as travel essays, short stories, and a novel. Writing for the educated, but non-specialist

reader in subjects ranging from history and psychology to literary criticism, Lee was well-known by many theorists and fiction writers during her lifetime, from Walter Pater to Sarah Orne Jewett. Although she was reviled by some such as William James for her bad taste in fictionalizing real people like his brother Henry, most readers like Edith Wharton praised her ability to evoke the atmosphere of a place.[7] Wharton first knew Vernon Lee through her books and then sought her out when touring Italy in 1894, well before writing her own first book, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897). Lee's books on eighteenth-century Italy were an inspiration for Wharton's first novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902), and Lee's familiarity with Italy and her wide circle of friends proved indispensable when Wharton was working on *Italian Villas and their Gardens* (1904). This book's dedication acknowledges both Lee's guidance and her talent: 'To Vernon Lee, who, better than any one else, has understood and interpreted the garden-magic of Italy.' Vernon Lee died in 1935, within months after Wharton began writing *The Buccaneers*, and her presence, at least as regards Wharton's treatment of place, haunts the novel. While these two women could not be said to be best friends, they were intellectual equals, who read each other's work and who shared a love of Italy, an international social and cultural circle, a similar 'secret sensitiveness,' and the experience of expatriation.[8]

A little known fact about Wharton's own expatriation is that in 1914, several years before she purchased her villa north of Paris, she considered buying Coopersale, a country house eighteen miles north of London (see fig. 1). Wharton's biographer R. W. B. Lewis says that she decided against the purchase when she learned of the heavy income tax on foreign residents. But her friend Percy Lubbock thought she 'chose to settle in Paris rather than London because she found England too staid and dowdy for her tastes.'[9] Wharton's statement in *A Backward Glance* that she would have 'preferred London' (258), instead of renting a flat in Paris for thirteen years, suggests that over time as she came to know more English men and women she revised her first impression that English people were provincial—not much interested in 'political and social preoccupations' beyond their national borders or in subjects beyond 'their individual occupations or hobbies' (216). There may well be clues to Wharton's mixed feelings about England in Sir Helmsley Thwarte's letter to his son in *The Buccaneers*. When Sir Helmsley finds himself at a shooting party with Americans, he begins to see his country through both English and American eyes: 'the absurdity and the impressiveness of our great ducal establishments, the futility of their domestic ceremonial, and their importance as custodians of historical tradition and of high (if narrow) social standards.'[10]

Whatever the case, in 1918 Wharton purchased Pavillon Columbe in the village of St.-Brice-sous-Forêt ten miles north of Paris. Shortly thereafter she published *French Ways and Their Meaning* (1919), in which she argues that the French excelled in the art of living, applying 'to living the same rules that they applied to artistic creation,' in contrast to the Anglo-Saxons whose puritanism led them to judge art as 'something apart from life.'[11] Diane de Margerie believes that this book enlightens readers more to what Wharton 'came to find in France than it does about the French.' Thus she argues that Wharton's analysis can be seen as 'unintentional autobiography,' as justification for moving to France: 'she aligns her personal convictions to her conception of art, and expresses what she herself needed in order to live in a world of her own making.'[12] From Wharton's life and letters we know that Italy was her first love, and although France perhaps suited the aesthetic geography of her soul, she was never completely at home there. In the decades after buying real estate in France, Wharton came to love spending time with American and British intellectuals and writers in English country homes, even as she avoided what she continued to perceive as the vacuous London social scene (*Glance*, 224). Each summer she carved out several weeks for vacations in England with kindred spirits and reciprocated with invitations to her homes in France—Pavillon Columbe and Sainte-Claire Chatêau in Hyères on the French Riviera. Millicent Bell speculates that 'instead of finding her niche in the existing social and physical landscape [Wharton] became a creator of places which provided for meetings of the chosen' (66). This view is confirmed in *A Backward Glance* where Wharton writes, 'My idea of society was (and still is) the daily companionship of the same five or six friends, and its pleasure is based on continuity' (224). One way to view such social geography is to use Lawrence Selden's term, 'republic of the spirit,' a priceless place that Lily Bart never reaches in *The House of Mirth* (1905). Perhaps it is not surprising that Wharton's harsh assessment of England in *French Ways and Their Meaning* is different from that of her American expatriate protagonist in *The Buccaneers*, written two decades later: 'I'm afraid I shall always feel strange in London drawing-rooms...but that hidden-away life of England, the old houses and their histories, and all the far-back things the old people hand on to their grandchildren—they seem so natural and home-like' (344–45). By that time Wharton had a close circle of cosmopolitan friends who frequently met in such congenial English locations as Howard Sturgis's home near Windsor (see fig. 2):

> At Queen's Acre some of the happiest hours of my life were passed, some of my dearest friendships formed or consolidated, and my own old friends welcomed because they were mine. For Howard Sturgis was not only one of the most amusing and lovable of companions, but untiring in hospitality to the friends of his friends. Indolent and unambitious though he was, his social gifts were irresistible, and his drawing-room...was always full of visitors. (*Glance*, 230).

Henry James's hospitality at Lamb House in Rye was much less lavish, but Wharton recalled that some of her 'richest hours' were spent 'under his roof' (see fig. 3):

> At Lamb House my host and I usually kept to ourselves until luncheon. Our working hours were the same, and it was only now and then that we went out before one o'clock to take a look at the green peas in the kitchen-garden, or to stroll down the High Street to the Post Office. But as soon as luncheon was dispatched (amid unnecessary apologies for its meagreness, and sarcastic allusions to my own supposed culinary extravagances) the real business of the day began.

That 'business' was to motor together to such enchanting destinations as the nearby 'spell-bound' Bodiam Castle (*Glance*, 244, 247–48, 249).

By the time Wharton wrote *The Buccaneers*, she seems to have sorted out her feelings towards England and the English as well as articulated her finely-tuned reactions toward place and perception. In this final novel, she suggests that the art of seeing, indeed the art of living, is latent in Anglo-Saxons on both sides of the Atlantic, and only needs fostering by the right teachers.[13] Wharton's conclusion echoes Vernon Lee's argument in her essay 'In Praise of Governesses,' that all nationalities, but especially the 'too-too stolid Anglo-Saxons,' benefit from the 'transfusion of a foreign element, correcting our deficiencies and faults and ripening (as the literature of Italy ripened our Elizabethans) our own intrinsic qualities.'[14] In *The Buccaneers* British governess Laura Testvalley, with ancestral ties to Italian revolutionaries and to the English Pre-Raphaelites, provides that foreign element for the American protagonist, Annabel St. George, affectionately known as Nan, and the painting and poetry of Miss Testvalley's cousin Dante Gabriel Rossetti does the same for Englishman Sir Helmsley Thwarte and his son Guy, with whom Nan falls in love. Thus, running counter to Wharton's clash of cultures plot (which allows for biting satire at the expense of both English aristocrats and American parvenus), is a cosmopolitan theme regarding an aesthetic and literary sensibility which crosses borders and disrupts the national typing that Wharton espouses in *French Ways and Their Meaning*. This

Fig 1. Coopersale House, the property Edith Wharton contemplated buying in 1914, Epping, England. This photograph was taken before 1921, the year in which the northeast wing was removed. *Courtesy of D. Baker, Coopersale, England.*

Fig 2. Queen's Acre, home of Howard Sturgis, Windsor, England. *Courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.*

theme propels the planned transnational marriage of Nan and Guy and allows for the cross-class romance between Sir Helmsley and Miss Testvalley.

The novel charts Nan's growth in understanding her 'secret sensitiveness' under Miss Testvalley's tutelage. Book I, which is set in Saratoga, New York, establishes the need for such instruction. As soon as Laura Testvalley steps off the train, she judges America a cultural and architectural wasteland. While other critics have speculated that Miss Testvalley is modeled on Wharton's very capable German governess and subsequent secretary, Anna Bahlmann, or perhaps her affectionate childhood nanny, Hannah Doyley,[15] I think there is also a bit of Vernon Lee in Wharton's portrait of Nan's teacher, who in her late thirties is the age Lee was when Wharton met her. Miss Testvalley's appearance and affect ('small, brown, interrogative,' 42) and certain aspects of her personality ('curt and distant' to all but her pupils, 60; 'often kind...seldom tender,' 335) resemble Vernon Lee's. There are other similarities as well: Miss Testvalley's fluency in Italian, her interest in history and literature, and her politics ('her sympathies were with the social as well as the political outcasts,' 68). Finally, the way that Wharton introduces Miss Testvalley to Nan's mother is significant. Mrs. St. George's astonishment on meeting the much admired governess may echo Wharton's first impression of the renowned Vernon Lee—a sense of surprise that she wasn't 'taller, more majestic' (49). Mrs. St. George's second impression seems consistent as well: 'Certainly Miss Testvalley looked insignificant; but the eyes under her expressive eyebrows were splendid, and she had an air of firmness' (51).[16] In pointing out such similarities, I do not mean to suggest that the real woman and the fictional character are one and the same. Vernon Lee, a repressed lesbian, was uneasy with her sexuality in a way that the heterosexual Laura Testvalley certainly is not. Vernon Lee could be a self-absorbed pedant; Miss Testvalley, although hardly self-effacing, dedicates herself to her pupils. Vernon Lee's novel *Miss Brown* satirizes what she saw as the 'sins, shams, insipidity and ridiculous artificialities of the so-called "fleshly school,"' the very Pre-Raphaelite writers and painters that Miss Testvalley adores (Gunn, 101).

Book II of *The Buccaneers*, when the American girls go to England for the British season, reveals more substantive links between Wharton's and Lee's theories about sensitivity to place. The English setting also provides readers with a chance to assess the effects of Miss Testvalley's tutoring. Sir Helmsley Thwarte singles out Nan as the only American who 'seems to understand something of her environment, which is a

sealed book to the others.' He speculates that Miss Testvalley is the source of Nan's fascination with the history of the English country homes and her 'emotional sense' of their beauty (234–35). Near the end of Book III, Nan confirms his hypothesis when she says that Miss Testvalley 'has shown her better than anybody' how to appreciate 'that hidden away life of England, the old houses and their histories' (345). Nan's receptivity to her environment combines feeling and imagination in the same empathic force that Vernon Lee found so powerful,[17] and that Wharton found so exceptional in Lee's writing.

In the English setting, Wharton immediately and repeatedly compares Nan's way of perceiving her surroundings with that of her American family and friends. In the first English country home they stay in, Allfriars, Nan's older sister Virginia, who has not had the benefit of Miss Testvalley's tutelage, sees *literally*: 'a big room with cracks in the ceiling, and bits of plaster off the wall' (132). In contrast Nan sees *imaginatively*: 'I like to imagine all those people on the walls [in the portraits], in their splendid historical dresses, walking about in the big rooms. Don't you believe they come down at night sometimes' (133). While Virginia finds such talk both babyish and scary, Nan links her own thoughts to Miss Testvalley's history lessons. Vernon Lee defines this way of seeing the world as 'an historical habit of mind' and contrasts her own passion for old houses with a friend's feeling of creepiness, the feeling Wharton gives Virginia. Lee argues that a historical way of perceiving the world, such as Nan's, carries a 'spiritual advantage': 'the sense of being companioned by the past, of being in a place warmed for our living by the lives of others.'[18] When reflecting on Virginia's ahistoric sense of the world ('limited to people, the clothes they wore, and the carriages they drove in'), Nan thinks in terms similar to Lee's that '[i]t must be cold and lonely...in such an empty colourless world as her sister's' (132, 133).

Vernon Lee ranked the historical habit of mind as second only to 'deriving pleasure from nature' through all the senses (*Limbo*, 29). Nan displays this important visual sensitivity, once again in contrast with her sister Virginia, when the young women vacation at Lady Churt's Runnymede cottage on the Thames. Wharton writes that while 'Virginia's attention travelled barely as far as the circles of calceolarias and lobelias dotting the lawn, and the vases of red geraniums and purple petunias which flanked the door,' it is only Nan on whom 'the river was not lost' (155). It is significant that Virginia responds to her sister's sensitivity to her environment by criticizing her, which causes Nan to suppress her comments, much as Wharton did as a child. Nan's shyness with people, her attraction to beautiful places, and her 'pity' for her

sister's unimaginative 'colourless world' despite Virginia's 'superiority' in looks and ease and self-confidence resemble both Wharton's own emotions and for that matter Vernon Lee's. Wharton writes that for Nan 'the impact of new scenes usually made itself felt before that of new people: 'Her soul opened slowly and timidly to her kind, but her imagination rushed out to the beauties of the visible world' (133). Vernon Lee's biographers have suggested that her sensitivity to places was a byproduct of her initial shyness in establishing human relationships and her difficulty in maintaining them. The metaphors in her travel writing give credence to such a theory. In a significant reversal of the expected tenor and vehicle of her metaphor, Lee explains the significance of 'friends' by comparing them to places that people find comforting. She goes on to analyze the benefit of such friendly places—'for it is the good of charming us, of raising our spirits, of subduing our feelings into serenity and happiness; of singing in our memories like melodies; and bringing out, even as melodies do when we hear or remember them, whatever small twitter of music there may be in our soul.'[19] For Lee and Wharton places could be either friends or enemies, seducers or soul mates. From her first book, *The Decoration of Houses*, to her last Wharton writes of the 'relations' that people have 'with their rooms,'[20] in terms very similar to those that Vernon Lee used.

In *The Buccaneers* Wharton rewrites the traditional courtship novel by using an imaginative response to place as a test for compatibility. Almost as soon as Nan arrives in England, she falls in love with Guy Thwarte's family home, Honourslove, which Wharton modeled on Stanway, the Gloucester home of her friends Lord and Lady Elcho (see figs. 4 and 5). Nan finds herself 'suddenly at ease with the soft mellow place, as though some secret thread of destiny attached her to it' (136). Vernon Lee explains such a love-at-first sight reaction to place as the product of repression: 'The places for which we feel such love are fashioned, before we see them, by our wishes and fancy; we recognize rather than discover them in the world of reality; and this power of shaping, or at least seeing, things to suit our hearts' desire, comes not of facility and surfeit, but of repression and short commons.'(*Traveller*, 4). Wharton parallels Nan's responses to the house with her feelings for Guy, who grew up there. Their first conversation begins with the shared experience of seeing the 'magic' of afternoon light bathing the house and the rolling hills surrounding it in a 'honey-coloured' glow (136–37). What follows is the mutual realization that they both relate to places aesthetically, sensually, historically, and imaginatively through literature. Unlike the self-conscious, 'assertive' response of Virginia, who feels 'matched against things greater than herself,' Nan feels 'softly merged' with beautiful places, a metaphor of unity and unselfconsciousness (134). Guy feels something similar—that Honourslove is 'in his bones' (137), a metaphor which suggests both his family ties to the estate and his aesthetic response.

In this scene Wharton attempts to explain not simply the power of people to project feelings onto places, but the power of places to produce feelings in people. Vernon Lee termed the reciprocal phenomenon 'empathy' and popularized this concept, which German psychologist Theodor Lipps first called *Einfüchlung*.[21] According to Royal Gettmann, for Vernon Lee the concept meant 'not projection, or feeling into, but a merging of the beholder and the object beheld. Empathy is neither egotistical absorption and projection nor a passive, empty surrender: it is a collaboration.'[22] Wharton has Nan attempt to explain her similar complex reaction to place as 'the *beyondness* of things' (137). This odd use of *beyond* calls to mind Vernon Lee's use of the word in her conclusion to *The Sentimental Traveller*, where she links 'the passionate feeling for places to a habit of craving for the beyond,' which 'does not mean that the finest happiness exists in anticipation only, but that when it really comes in the present its most exquisite essence is but the remnant of expectation and longing.'(*Traveller*, 273, 274). In the way that Nan gropes for words to explain her feeling, Wharton suggests the difficulty of articulating and explaining such sensitivity without fully understanding it intellectually, and she implies the chance of remaining oblivious to such emotions without the words to articulate their existence.

In Nan's experience of finding herself 'suddenly at ease with the soft mellow place, as though some secret thread of destiny attached her to it' (136), Wharton reveals two characteristic byproducts of the aesthetic experience: a sense of harmony that overrides everyday concerns, producing contentment, and a sense of integration that produces feelings of self-acceptance and self-expansion.[23] The word *beyond* then also suggests a spiritual, almost transcendent, experience that Nan has as she observes the 'captured sunshine' in the stones of the house, the bricks of the garden walls and the flagstones of the terrace (136). In Vernon Lee's terms, Nan has seen Honorslove's *genius loci*, the spirit or essential character of a place. In *The Golden Keys* Lee explains that '[f]or whatever other bodies the gods may take, or stones or plants they may enter into, they love best to lurk in that most spiritual of all material things, the lights and shades of the temples which we have built or they have chosen.'[24] Guy calls the time of day that produces this luminescence 'the magic hour.' He not only validates Nan's feelings, but admits to the same

Fig 3. Garden view of Lamb House, home of Henry James, Rye, England. *Courtesy of Henry James Collection (#6251) Clifton Waller Barrett Library, Special Collections, The University of Virginia Library.*

Fig 4. Stanway House, the west front of Lord and Lady Elcho's home, Gloucestershire, England. *From Country Life Illustrated (July 1, 1899), Courtesy of Special Collections, The University of Virginia Library.*

experience himself, advancing the theory that 'when two people have reached it together,' 'they *are* "beyond"' (137). Thus Guy adds another layer of meaning and perhaps an intertextual reference to this paradoxically imprecise but highly suggestive word. Guy alludes to a world of shared values and sensitivities, or a kind of 'republic of the spirit' beyond the pull of their separate social and even national concerns. This reference might also echo Lily's hopeful seal, '*Beyond!*,' on her letter to Lawrence Selden as well as his vain hope that he can take Lily Bart 'beyond the ugliness, the pettiness, the attrition and corrosion of the soul.'[25] While *The House of Mirth*, written early in Wharton's career, articulates the desire for 'a republic of the spirit,' *The Buccaneers* fulfills it.

The deep relationship that Wharton represents between Guy and Honourslove, between person and place, Vernon Lee equates with a long-term human relationship to a place that retains life's 'poetry.' She believes that 'there are one or two places for every individual, where you may live habitually, yet never lose the sense of delight, wonder, and gratitude.'[26] To explain his feelings for his ancestral home and ultimately the reason that he is willing to leave Honourslove to finance the estate's needs, Guy offers Nan an analogy similar to Lee's: 'I supposed if one were married to a woman one adored, one would soon get beyond her beauty. That's the way I feel about Honourslove' (137). Guy's and Nan's delight in discovering their similar sensibilities seems destined to bring them together, but Wharton constructs the plot much the way romance novelists do. She creates tension and suspense by removing Guy, who is an engineer, to South America to make money for the upkeep on Honourslove. He refuses to compromise his integrity by marrying a wealthy woman he does not love, unlike other needy land owners in the novel.

The twists and turns in the courtship plot hinge on Nan's emerging sense of self, which depends in part on understanding the significance of her relationship with places and on realizing the significance of her visual sensitivity and aesthetic sensibility. Her naïve understanding literally causes her to marry the wrong man, a parallel to Wharton's own bad choice in marrying the socialite Teddy Wharton. With Guy in South America, Nan falls in love with the history and romance of Tintagel, a place she has read about in Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* under Miss Testvalley's tutelage. Wharton herself visited the legendary King Arthur's castle for the first time only a few years before beginning *The Buccaneers* and was enthralled by the fog-enveloped ruins (Lewis 483–84; see fig. 6). In Cornwall Nan encounters Tintagel on a solitary walk, in the serendipitous manner that Vernon Lee liked best, unexpectedly while

'journeying without a goal' (*Genius Loci*, 118). When Nan happens upon the ruins, she experiences what Vernon Lee calls an *amours de voyage*—'a drama of the imagination' or an infatuation divorced from reality.[27] Lee distinguishes between a true passion for a place, such as Guy has for Honourslove, and an *amours de voyage*, such as Nan feels at Tintagel. After meeting Guy Thwarte, Nan naïvely assumes that everyone in a beautiful old house must share his sensibility.

Using the fog that sweeps romantically in on the wind at Cornwall, Wharton contrasts Nan's sensitivity to place with the uptight Duke of Tintagel's indifference to the poetics of place and to poetry itself. Again Wharton uses Dante Gabriel Rossetti as a literary touchstone, but unlike Guy, the Duke has not read Rossetti's sonnets. Thus Wharton foreshadows Nan's incompatibility with the Duke, just as she has foreshadowed Nan's compatibility with Guy. Wharton differentiates Guy's love of the beauty and history of Honourslove from the Duke's pride in place and title. While Honourslove enchants Guy and his father, it does not totally direct their lives:

> Each had the same love for the ancient habitation of their race, which enchanted but could not satisfy them, each was anxious to play the part fate had allotted to him, and each was dimly conscious of an inability to remain confined in it, and painfully aware that their secret problems would have been unintelligible to most men of their own class and kind. (110)

In contrast the Duke is possessed by, rather than captivated by, his property, and consequently he compromises himself for it. Paradoxically, at the same time that the Duke derives his identity from his property, he hates the social and political obligations his title demands and the work the estate requires. He thinks he would rather own a clock shop. When Nan on first meeting him mistakes him for a Mr. Robinson, the Duke for a moment imagines owning that clock shop, but the loss of title accompanying the new role diminishes his sense of worth, and he quickly shrinks from the fantasy. Like other English aristocratic families strapped for cash in this novel, the Duke of Tintagel is trapped by his property and the status it confers.

Thus Nan's falling in love with this insipid, passionless man is difficult for readers to imagine, and indeed Wharton herself does not seem to have been able to imagine their courtship since she does not represent it. But later Wharton makes sure that readers know why Nan has married. Although Nan does not want to 'admit' it to herself, the narrator lets readers know that:

> her first sight of the ruins of Tintagel had played a large part in her wooing...if the Duke had been only the dullest among the amiable but dull young men who came to the bungalow at Runnymede she would hardly have given him a second thought. But the idea of living in that magic castle by the sad western sea had secretly tinged her vision of the castle's owner. (249)

While Nan's marriage to Tintagel in Guy's absence is shocking to readers, it makes dramatic and thematic sense in a *Bildungsroman* about coming to understand one's 'secret sensitiveness.' What Nan realizes too late is that the Duke of Tintagel neither sees the ancient place imaginatively nor understands the people who live and work on the property as she does:

> To Annnabel, the Cornish castle spoke with the rich low murmur of the past.... Though the walls of Tintagel were relatively new, they were built on ancient foundations, and crowded with the treasures of the past; and near by was the mere of Excalibur, and from her windows she could see the dark gray sea, and sometimes, at night-fall, the mysterious barge with black sails putting out from the ruined castle to carry the dead King to Avalon. Of all this, nothing existed for her husband. He saw the new Tintagel only as a costly folly of his father's, which family pride obliged him to keep up with fitting state. (249–50)

Wharton charts Nan's progress in understanding not just to illustrate the danger of equating house and man, or assuming, as Susan Goodman has argued that 'setting reflects character,'[28] but to underline the danger of thinking one can know a place at first sight. The picturesque beauty of Tintagel causes Nan to romanticize the place and thus at first to miss the harsh lives of the workers behind the scenes; her unfamiliarity with titled aristocracy means she does not comprehend the social obligations and ceremonial functions of Dukes and Duchesses. When she becomes aware of the poverty and hardship of the peasants around her, the Duke forbids her involvement as inappropriate and Nan becomes a prisoner in her role as the young Duchess.

Nan St. George becomes Annabel Tintagel, and the longer she is forced to enact the role the more she becomes a person she does 'not know' (241). Perhaps not surprisingly, Wharton expresses Nan's discomfort as a reaction to the house as well as to her position. Nan feels ill at ease in the room designated as the Duchess's sitting room; she terms the room 'a stupid oppressive room—somebody else's room' (245). The Duke is oblivious to his wife's emotional discomfort, and his mother will not let

Nan change the room in any way because of family tradition. This is not a trivial matter in Wharton's view because, as she argues in *The Decoration of Houses*, such decorating rigidity creates 'discomfort' in those who must inhabit rooms they do not like (18–19). Significantly, when Guy returns from South America, he suggests she would enjoy both her sitting room and the Corregio paintings found there more if she 'had the courage to sweep away all those . . . family mementoes' (285). During the warm weather Wharton gives Nan such a necessary 'refuge' (317) in the neglected Temple of Love, an unfortunately heavy-handed architectural symbol, but significant all the same. Nan finds this place consoling not because of its physical beauty—the stucco is peeling and the door swings loose on broken hinges—but because it affords a 'retreat' from the big house, a private place to read and write (318). In the scene in which the Temple of Love figures so prominently, Nan goes there to think about whether she should leave her husband and return to America.[29] In this section of the novel Wharton explores Vernon Lee's belief that even in an environment among 'ghosts of unkind passions,' 'consolation' can be found 'in the friendship of one small corner of grace or beauty.' In an essay entitled 'Other Friendships,' Lee explains that during a week in a 'grim ancestral Scottish home' she found such 'comforting' intimacy in a kitchen garden (*Hortas Vitae*, 77, 80–81).

Wharton's plot trajectory of *The Buccaneers* questions how long a friendly place in an unfriendly social geography can bring consolation and it also revisits Wharton's own earlier notions about England. When Nan realizes that she is not 'at home' in either the Tintagel country estate or her marriage to the Duke, she first thinks she can never be at home in England, and so she contemplates returning to America and her father's protection. But listening to her unhappy friend Conchita's reasons for rejecting a return to America causes Nan to realize that although she is not attracted to the London social scene as Conchita is, she too feels a strong affinity for England, where the 'layers and layers of rich deep background, of history, poetry, old traditional observances, beautiful houses, beautiful landscapes, beautiful ancient buildings, palaces, churches, cathedrals' make the 'mental and moral' air of her family with its 'interest in the fashions and follies' of society seem thin (305). While Viola Winner finds such introspection more 'the voice of Edith Wharton justifying her own expatriation and cultural preferences than a convincing representation of the character's thoughts,'[30] which is certainly true, these thoughts are necessarily Nan's as well if we think of this novel as her education about her relationship to places.

In *The Buccaneers*, Nan comes to understand both the hidden geogra-

Fig 5. Great window in the hall of Lord and Lady Elcho's home, Stanway House, Gloucestershire, England. *From Country Life Illustrated (July 1, 1899), Courtesy of Special Collections, The University of Virginia Library.*

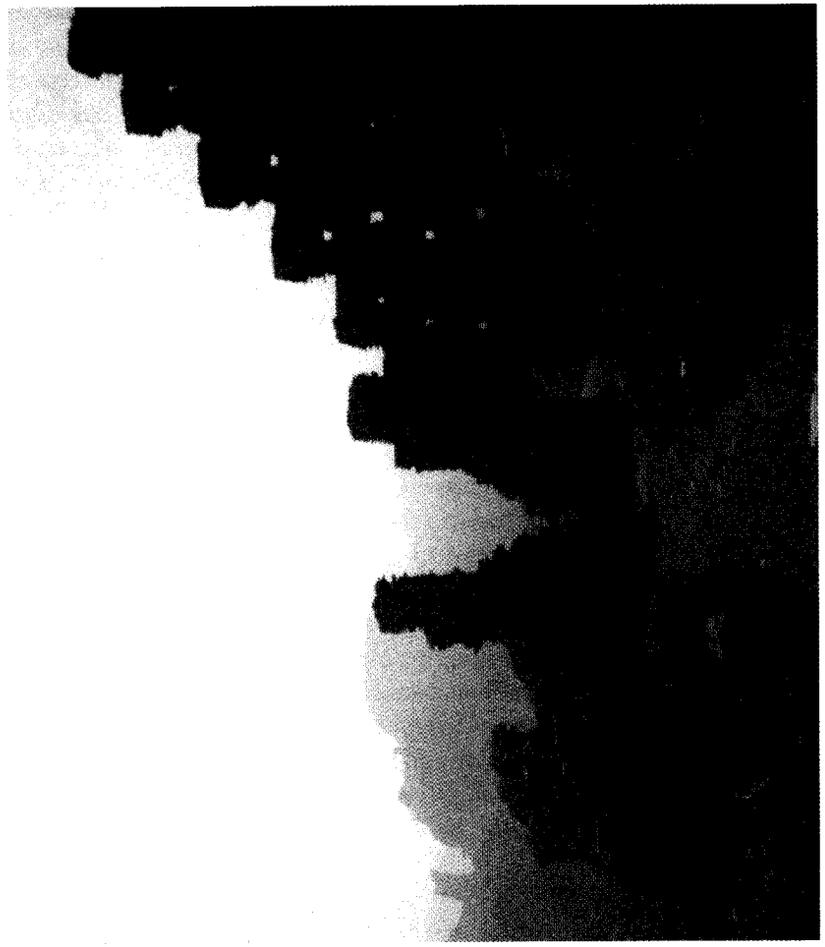

Fig 6. Ruins of Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, England. *Courtesy of Linda Sommer, www.HealingArtsNetwork.com.*

phy of her own soul and the hidden complexity of a real place that at first seemed simply picturesque. Both lead her back to Guy Thwarte. Given her need to discuss her feelings with someone of similar sensibility, Wharton reintroduces Laura Testvalley. On the pretext of visiting old friends, but also as an escape from the Duke of Tintagel, Wharton removes Nan from the 'ponderous cornices and cupolas' (317) of his estate to a 'broad-faced amiable brick house with regular windows' (332). Only when Nan spends some time at Champions with its human architectural dimensions and its inhabitants' nourishing talk of travel and books and ideas does Nan rediscover her earlier self and begin to feel at ease and at home in the world, even though she is neither in her own house nor in her own country. Wharton marks this change by once again referring to Annabel Tintagel as Nan. From Champions, Nan revisits Honourslove, and her relationship with Guy and his house begins where it left off years before. Nan and Guy literally spend the day with the house—its history, its views, its furnishings: 'They had visited the old house room by room, lingering long over each pictures, each piece of rare old furniture or tapestry' (345). This is one of the last scenes of the unfinished novel, and the last scene in which readers see Nan. By having Nan remember her first visit to Honourslove when she was 'so tongue-tied and bewildered by the surge of her feelings' (343), Wharton suggests that if someone had earlier 'taught her the words' for these feelings (343), Nan's life might have been different. Wharton's concerns about Americans' lack of sensitivity to places anticipate Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson's recent argument that most Americans 'are not aware of the range and intensity of the enjoyable experiences available to them through the sense of vision.' Guy's and Nan's many-layered experience of Honourslove corresponds to Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's theory of the four interactive responses that people can have to works of art: perceptual, emotional, intellectual, and communicative.[31] There is textual evidence in *The Buccaneers* that Wharton hoped her English readers would learn a thing or two about sensitivity to place as well. In the last few pages, Sir Helmsley tells Nan: 'We English are spoilt; we've ceased to feel the beauty, to listen to the voices. But you and she [Laura Testvalley] come to it with fresh eyes and fresh imaginations—you happen to be blessed with both. I wish more of our Englishwomen felt it all as you do' (345).

Wharton's plans for the novel call for Nan, with the assistance of Miss Testvalley, to leave the Duke of Tintagel for Guy. Sir Helmsley was then to have disinherited his son because of the scandal and abandoned his budding relationship with Miss Testvalley because she assisted

the young lovers. Wharton kept rewriting the unfinished manuscript of *The Buccaneers* rather than completing it. Recognizing such delaying tactics, John Updike speculated that she did so because the project had too many loose ends, but I prefer reviewer Andrew Delbanco's theory that Wharton did not finish *The Buccaneers* 'because she was not fully committed to carrying out the ending that her own "scenario" prescribed.'[32] Did Wharton want Nan, her smart, sensitive, but not physically striking protagonist, to have it all: tall, handsome soul mate and lovely, historic home in the country? Did *The Buccaneers*, which Wharton began while she was finishing her memoir, become for her a fanciful rewriting of her life—in which she lived in England, instead of France, and after her divorce married a man who was both her intellectual equal and a sharer of her 'secret sensitiveness,' much like her life-long friend Walter Berry?

I do not know. What I do know from the unfinished novel we are left with is that by examining a young American girl's growth in understanding her sensitivity to places, perhaps the aging Wharton had finished what most interested her about this narrative. Theorists of the *Bildungsroman* have suggested that the coming-of-age narrative is often employed as a novel of education for readers as well as for the protagonist. In *The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology* (1927) Vernon Lee, anticipating contemporary reader response critics, argues that writers affect readers by 'awakening in readers echoes, images, feelings, which were already latent within us.' Of all of the books by Vernon Lee in Wharton's library, and there were many, *The Handling of Words* is heavily marked, especially one chapter entitled 'The Nature of the Writer,' from which this quotation comes.[33] This chapter is just as much about the nature of the reader as the writer. In telling Nan's coming-of-age story Wharton surely attempted to mentor her readers, especially her Anglo-Saxon readers on both sides of the Atlantic, in the way that Vernon Lee mentored her and that Laura Testvalley mentored Nan: giving readers words for inchoate feelings about places that they might already have, words Wharton did not have until she read Vernon Lee's books about Italy.

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NOTES

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1. See Gaillard Lapsley's 'A Note on *The Buccaneers*' in Edith Wharton's *The Buccaneers* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1938). Citations in my text are to this edition. Edmund Wilson, 'Justice to Edith Wharton' in *Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Irving Howe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), 30; Carol Wershoven *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1982), 163; John Updike, 'Reworking Wharton,' *New Yorker* (October 4, 1993), 199; Claire Preston, *Edith Wharton's Social Register* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 169–170.
2. See especially Adeline R. Tintner's *Edith Wharton in Context: Essays in Intertextuality* (Tuscaloosa; University of Alabama Press, 1999), 143–52, which explores Wharton's use of Correggio, Rossetti, and Morris and illuminates the real-life models for Nan St. George and Conchita Closson, both of whom Wharton knew: Consuelo Vanderbilt, who married and separated from the Duke of Marlborough, and Consuelo Yznaga, a Brazilian American, who became Lady Mandeville and then Lady Manchester. See also Janet Goodwyn's *Edith Wharton: Traveller in the Land of Letters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 149–152.
3. Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (1934; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 28, 54.
4. Sarah Bird Wright quotes an excerpt from this letter in *Edith Wharton A to Z* (New York: Facts on File, 1998), 150.
5. Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 130, 132. These books were *Belcaro* (1881), *Euphorion* (1884), and *Studies of the Eighteenth-Century in Italy* (1887).
6. Wharton is quoted in Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856–1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 179–80.
7. For an assessment of Vernon Lee's career and a complete analysis of her work, see *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* by Vineta Colby (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003). In addition to her books published in England, Lee's travel essays appeared regularly in the *Westminster Gazette*.
8. For interesting analyses of Wharton and Lee's relationship, see Millicent Bell's *Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Story of Their Friendship* (London: Peter Owen, 1966), 60–64, and Colby's *Vernon Lee*, 184–88. See Lee's review of Wharton's *The Valley of Decision* in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. Millicent Bell (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199–202.
9. R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 148; Susan Goodman, 'Edith Wharton's Inner Circle,' *The Wretched Exotic: Essays on Edith Wharton in Europe*, ed. Katherine Joslin and Alan Price (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 53.
10. Edith Wharton, *The Buccaneers* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1938), 232.
11. Edith Wharton, *French Ways and their Meaning* (1919; Lee, Massachusetts: Berkshire House Books, 1997) 39, 40.
12. Diane de Margerie, Introduction to Wharton's *French Ways and Their Meaning*, vii. For further analysis of Wharton's relationship to Europe see Shari Benstock's 'Landscapes of Desire: Edith Wharton and Europe' and Millicent Bell's 'Edith Wharton in France'; both essays are in the collection *Wretched Exotic: Essays on Edith Wharton in Europe*, ed. Katherine Joslin and Alan Price (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).
13. Wharton extols education as a corrective in *French Ways and Their Meaning*, 52–53.

14. Vernon Lee, *Hortus Vitae: Essays on the Gardening of Life*, (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1903), 18.
15. Adeline R. Tintner, *Edith Wharton in Context: Essays on Intertextuality*, 145; Gloria C. Erlich, *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 166.
16. My information about Vernon Lee's appearance and personality comes from Peter Gunn's biography, Burdett Gardner's *The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of Vernon Lee* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 53, 55, 217, and Vineta Colby's *Vernon Lee*, 131, 183–84. Of her politics, Colby writes that along with being a declared Dreyfusard, an outspoken opponent of colonial wars, and an antivivisectionist, Lee 'vigorously supported social reform, equal rights for women, and a broadly socialist ideology' (180). Much like Wharton, Lee was in the social elite, but her circle was the cultural elite. In 'Psychologie d'un écrivain' (as quoted in Colby, 180), Lee wrote, 'I am a liberal by conviction,' but she went on to say, 'I have a horror of privilege, luxury, everything that supports mindlessness, the misery of others, but the egalitarian idea chills me. I like certain aristocratic sides [*côtes*], and with a faith in the future, I am attached to the past' (249).
17. Lee, *The Sentimental Traveller: Notes on Places* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1908), 9.
18. Vernon Lee, *Limbo and Other Essays* (1897; London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1908), 29, 25, 30.
19. Vernon Lee, *Genius Loci and The Enchanted Woods* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1906), 12.
20. Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, *The Decoration of Houses* (New York: Scribner's 1897), 18.
21. Vernon Lee put forward the concept of empathy in 'Beauty and Ugliness,' an essay published in *The Contemporary Review* (1897), a concept that became much more widely known when it was discussed in *The Beautiful* (1913). Theodor Lipps published his theory of *Einfühlung*, or 'feeling into,' in his *Raumästhetik* in 1896.
22. Royal A. Gettmann, introduction to the reprint of Vernon Lee's *The Handling of Words* (1927; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), xii.
23. Monroe Beardsley, 'Aesthetic Experience,' *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*, ed. Michael J. Wreen and Donald M. Callen (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982).
24. Vernon Lee, *The Golden Keys and Others Essays on the Genius Loci* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925), 212.
25. Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905; New York: Signet Classic, 2000), 162, 70.
26. Lee, *Genius Loci*, 14. For Lee they are Tuscan valleys where her home is outside Florence and 'certain river districts' in England.
27. Lee, *Genius Loci*, 120.
28. Susan Goodman, *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends and Rivals* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1990), 141.
29. In a parallel scene, the Dowager Duchess finds 'liberation' from her duties in the small conservatory attached to the dower-house where she exults in the 'joys' of potting her own plants, so much more satisfying that touring the conservatories tended by gardeners (322).
30. Viola Winner's introduction to *The Buccaneers* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) xxiii–xxiv.
31. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and Rick E. Robinson, *The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of*

the Aesthetic Encounter (Malibu, California: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1990), 2. They explain the four ways of seeing as: 'a perceptual response, which concentrated on elements such as balance, form, and harmony; an emotional response, which emphasized reactions to the emotional content of the work and personal associations; an intellectual response, which focused on theoretical and art historical questions; and, finally, what we characterized as the communicative response, wherein there was a desire to relate to the artist, or to his or her time, or to his or her culture, through the mediation of the work of art' (28).

32. Andrew Delbanco, 'Missed Manners,' *New Republic* (October 25, 1993), 36.
33. Vernon Lee, *The Handling of Words*, 74. Wharton shares with Vernon Lee the sense that the emotions stirred by places 'may be transmitted,' the quotation I use as an epigraph (Lee, *Sentimental Traveller*, 281). Books Wharton owned by Vernon Lee (at least in the portion of Wharton's library that remains intact) are listed in *Edith Wharton's Library: A Catalogue compiled by George Ramsden*, (Settrington: Stone Trough Books, 1999), 75–76):

Limbo and other Essays, London: Grant Richards, 1897.
Genius Loci and The Enchanted Woods (1899 & 1905). Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1906.
Gospels of Anarchy, and Other Contemporary Studies. London: Fisher Unwin, 1908. Unopened.
Vanitas; Polite Stories. (1892) London: John Lane, 1911. Unopened.
Vital Lies: Studies of some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism. London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1912.
Louis Norbert. London: John Lane, 1914. inscription: 'to Edith Wharton just in time to thank her again for the enchanting two days she has given me. Vernon (reduce da Siena) May 24, 1914.'
The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology. London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1923. The chapter called 'The Nature of the Writers' is much marked.
The Golden Keys, and Other Essays on the Genius Loci. London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1925. Partly unopened.

ERIN ATCHISON

Transporting Elizabeth's Piano: Literature and the Piano in the Early American Republic

In *The Pioneers* by James Fenimore Cooper there is a piano in the Hall of Temple Mansion. The piano is small and unobtrusive, and it is noted only by the presence of the young hunter Oliver Edwards, who is later revealed as the gentleman Effingham. He is unexpectedly at ease with, and indeed contemptuous of, the lavish surroundings:

> The hand that held the cap, rested lightly on the little ivory-mounted piano of Elizabeth, with neither rustic restraint, nor obtrusive vulgarity. A single finger touched the instrument, as if accustomed to dwell on such places. (68)

This is not Cooper's first reference in the novel to the piano. A few pages earlier, he likens Temple's conversation to a musical accompaniment:

> ...his conversation at such moments was much like an accompaniment on the piano, a thing that is heard without being attended to. (65)

These three sentences can say more about Cooper's use of social conventions than his entire interior descriptions put together. The nonchalant mention of a piano alludes to Elizabeth's social grace, Marmaduke Temple's responsibilities as a father, and even Oliver's uncertain social standing. Furthermore, if Oliver is accustomed to dwell with the piano, then he is equally comfortable with its owner Elizabeth.

When Cooper was writing *The Pioneers* the piano was popular and desirable, but still an extremely expensive household object. In the year of *The Pioneer's* publication, 1823, a journalist wrote in the *Boston Euterpeiad*:

> ...[pianos] are now justly considered to be a most important, if not *indispensable* article, to every family that makes any pretensions to either taste or fashion. (Tawa, *Sweet Songs* 180)

Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations, 8.1